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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PRM AND NEA/I

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TAGS: PREL PREF PHUM EU IZ UK

SUBJECT: UNITED KINGDOM BEGINS RELOCATION OF SOME IRAQI
LOCALLY EMPLOYED STAFF

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connally for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The first three participants in HMG's program to relocate selected Iraqi employees who worked for the British Government in Iraq arrived in the UK on April 8. According to John Burran, head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Office on Assistance to Iraqi Locally Employed Staff (LES), 75 Iraqis have signed up for HMG's relocation plan, of whom 63 have chosen the option of a financial payout rather than the option of resettlement in the UK. Within the FCO, the number of applicants choosing the financial package under the new program is seen as a possible indication Iraqis view the situation as improving and are willing to use the package to rebuild their lives in Iraq. Any Iraqi national who worked for HMG on or since August 8, 2007, may apply for relocation to the UK under this new HMG program; Iraqi nationals who worked for HMG after January 1, 2005 and left employment before August 8, 2007 are not eligible for this new program and the financial package option; these cases of former staff will continue to be handled through the existing HMG resettlement program for refugees resident in third countries, called "Gateway," in coordination with the UNHCR. Information on HMG's new Iraqi LES assistance program is available on the FCO website at <http://www.fco.gov.uk>. End summary.

First Iraqis Resettled Under New Plan

¶2. (SBU) On April 8, a RAF transport aircraft landed at RAF Brize Norton after a night flight originating in Basra, Iraq, carrying three Iraqi men and 15 of their family members. The arrivals were participants in a program announced by the Brown Government last August as an addition to the existing "Gateway" relocation program for Iraqi refugees. The new program which, unlike the Gateway Program is managed by the Foreign Office rather than the Home Office, was announced last summer, shortly after Prime Minister Brown took office. Under the new program, qualified participants have the option of accepting either a financial award to start a new life in Iraq or resettlement in the UK.

Who Qualifies

¶13. (SBU) Poloff met on April 11 with John Burran to discuss the new resettlement program and its operation. The new program is open to "Serving Staff," i.e., LES who were either employees of the UK military or other HMG agency in Iraq on August 8, 2007, and have completed at least 12 months in their position or, if they worked less than 12 months, were forced to leave because their jobs were terminated for operational reasons or due to exceptional circumstances, e.g. threats or intimidation. (Embassy note. August 8, 2007 was the date Prime Minister Brown publicly announced a review of HMG's assistance to its LES in Iraq. End note.) Not qualified to participate in this new relocation program are "Former Staff," LES who worked for HMG in Iraq and completed a minimum of 12 months' service but were employed by HMG on or after January 1, 2005 and left employment before August 8, 2007. These Former Staff may instead apply to relocate to the UK under the existing "Gateway" program, a traditional refugee resettlement program, under which an Iraqi LES resident in a third country applies for refugee processing through the UNHCR and is resettled in the UK under standard refugee processing criteria. Former Staff do not have the option of a financial package in lieu of resettlement.

¶14. (U) More specifically, the various resettlement programs for Serving and Former Staff is available to those who worked in the following capacities: as direct employees of the UK Armed Forces or Ministry of Defense (MOD); for the British Embassy in Baghdad or Embassy Offices in Basra and the Kurdistan Region; as direct employees of the Department for International Development (DFID); worked under the Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT); or were engaged by HMG

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to carry out police training programs.

Key Elements of the New Program

¶15. (C) Burran emphasized two aspects of the new assistance plan. First, the plan is meant to preserve the integrity of HMG's wider immigration and asylum policies and does not change HMG's existing refugee mechanisms. It is a one-time program designed for Iraqi LESs in recognition of "the unique and outstanding contributions accomplished under extraordinary conditions by Iraqi LESs contributing to the British mission in Iraq." The second key aspect is that the plan is a "reward based scheme," unlike current refugee and asylum resettlement programs which can require an assessment of personal threat before resettlement can take place. Burran said the new plan requires a LES to whom assistance will be offered to meet the work and time in position criteria, beyond that no further assessment of risk is required. Burran told Poloff that two individual applicants have challenged the refusal to qualify for the new program; both challenges failed in UK courts.

Options for Assistance

¶16. (SBU) Burran provided further background on the assistance being offered to Serving and Former Staff. Serving Staff are offered one of three options: a one time financial settlement; exceptional leave to enter the UK through application made by their former employers; or resettlement in the UK through the previously existing UK Gateway refugee resettlement program. Burran said whichever option a LES chooses he/she cannot change their mind later; it is a one-time offer and an irreversible decision. The financial package is a payment equivalent to one month's salary for every two months employed, plus 10 percent of the total sum for each dependent up to five dependents. The maximum payment would be for 18 months and the minimum for

six months. The second option requires an application be submitted by the agency or department that employed the LES and the applicants stay in Iraq while their cases are being considered. If approved, the recipients are then transported to the UK, met upon arrival and given an "integration package" -- government assistance in finding UK employment. The first three Iraqis who arrived in the UK aboard the military aircraft are being relocated in Scotland under this option. The third option available to "Serving Staff" is closely aligned with the UK's existing Gateway resettlement program, run in coordination with the UNHCR, and would be available for an LES applicant living outside of Iraq in a third country.

Dependents

17. (U) Burran said that the determination of which dependents may accompany an LES in resettlement is based upon existing British regulations on dependent criteria, not Iraqi or Muslim criteria. This means that the UK will not accept a husband with multiple wives or children from those wives. Applicants will be coming to live in the UK and are expected to live by UK marital laws, explained Burran. If an applicant has two, three or four wives he must pick one wife, or a civil partner, to accompany him. Children must be under the age of 18 and not leading independent lives with their own families.

The Program By the Numbers

18. (C) Burran told Poloff that the new LES relocation program is a joint effort of the FCO, the Home Office, DFID and MOD. The FCO estimates that since the beginning of operations in Iraq, the British government has employed thousands of Iraqis in various capacities; some for only very short periods of time. When considering the criteria for the

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various programs, HMG assesses there are approximately 450 eligible "Former Staff" with 1000-2000 dependents who may apply for the Gateway program. The Gateway program for Iraq does not have an "expiration date," said Burran, but it is "unlikely" applications for the program will be accepted indefinitely.

19. (C) Burran said it is thought within the FCO that the number of applicants choosing the financial package under the new program indicates the Iraqis see the situation improving in their country and want to stay and use the package to get a "head-start" rebuilding their lives in Iraq. There is, however, some concern the eligible Iraqis may be taking the financial option because the relocation application into the UK takes too long to process.

Three to Six Months to Relocate

110. (C) Burran said the time to process an application under the new Iraqi LES assistance program and for the applicant to then travel to the UK had been three to four months for the first three individuals under the program; the average length of time to process a Gateway application can be up to six months. Under the new program for Serving Staff, applications are submitted by the agency which employed the applicant in Iraq. Upon receipt, the application is sent to the UK for an intelligence screening to determine if there is evidence of a criminal record, possible association with war crimes or participation in terrorist organizations. A panel of members from the employing HMG departments in Iraq review the application, discuss any extenuating circumstances, determine eligibility, decide on accepting or rejecting the application and issue notification to the applicant of the panel's findings.

Comment

¶11. (C) Though creation of the Iraqi LES assistance program was considered under the Blair administration, serious efforts to get the program up-and-running were not undertaken until UK media criticized the Brown government in the summer of 2007 for "abandoning loyal LES staff." Burran offered no estimate of the number of "Serving Staff" who could qualify under the new program. Currently, this rewards based relocation or financial package program only exists for Iraq; it does not exist for LES personnel serving with British forces in Afghanistan, for example. Burran said there are no plans to initiate such a program in Afghanistan.

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